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Iran Trains Terrorists to Hijack, Kidnap

Iran is training terrorists to hijack airliners and kidnap hostages, with special vengeance toward Americans. This underground warfare, directed by the Iranian foreign ministry, has accounted for the deaths of at least 262 Americans since 1983.

Encouraged by the absence of an effective U.S. response, the Iranians not only remain unrepentant but have made Americans their principal targets.

U.S. intelligence has pinpointed two hijacker-training centers in Iran: one near Mehrabad airport outside Tehran, the other near the holy city of Qom. We've seen secret satellite photos, which show commercial airliners parked at the training camps; they are used by the recruits as "hands-on" instruction material in the methods of hijacking modern airliners.

The training courses include familiarization with the instruments, fuel consumption and other features of Boeing 727s and 747s, as well as Airbus 300s. Some of the planes are on loan from Mehrabad airport during "down time" between international flights.

Part of the training is in the psychology of hijacking and hostage treatment. The Iranian instructors teach a cynical mix of techniques that alternate between brutality to Americans (to instill fear in the captive passengers) and occasional small kindnesses (to prevent any desperate resistance by the hostages).

The Central Intelligence Agency has no clear idea how many potential hijackers are taking the deadly training, but a Saudi Arabian intelligence report, which the CIA considers credible, estimates that 55 student terrorists studied hijacking in Iran

in late 1984 alone. They included Iranians, Iraqis, Tunisians, Moroccans and Egyptians—and at least one Saudi. The report identified the chief instructor as a Palestinian guerrilla who had participated in airliner hijackings.

At present, there are about half a dozen other terrorist training camps in Iran. Several are reserved for foreigners recruited by the Ayatollah Khomeini's agents from among Moslem students and workers throughout the Middle East, Asia, Western Europe and even the United States.

Students at the camps get three months' indoctrination in Moslem fundamentalist ideology as well as in the nuts and bolts of terrorist operations, including construction and placement of sophisticated demolition devices.

The CIA has also received detailed reports of an estimated 30 groups of female terrorists taking similar training at segregated camps in Tehran, Qom, Isfahan and Behechtieh. One alumna reportedly effused to her fellow terrorists: "Our Imam Khomeini has authorized us to participate in the holy war against the atheist enemies of the Islamic Republic. We are the kamikazes of Islam. We will each die after killing a hundred enemies—where in the world is not important."

The terrorists trained in Iran's "boot camps" share one trait: devotion to Khomeini, whose scowling image glares at Iranians from every wall poster and television set. The ayatollah refers to the United States as "the Great Satan" and inspires fellow fanatics with this weird call to arms: "All Moslems must rise up and conquer their fear of death so that they can conquer the whole world!"